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CIA operations and public exposure

Like the proverbial mountain, the Senate Intelligence Committee has labored mightily for three years and brought forth a mouse in the form of a bill to provide congressional oversight of American intelligence agencies which the Senate passed this week.

Even as the Senators were voting 89 to 1 to improve security by reducing from eight to two the number of congressional committees that have to be informed by the president of covert action operations, their failure to provide any real protection for the CIA officers undercover abroad who have to carry out these secret operations was being dramatically demonstrated.

The June issue of the *Cover Action Information Bulletin* hit the newsstands with its revelations just as the senators were explaining how their proposed repeal of the Hughes-Ryan amendment would prevent the leaks that had seemed inevitable so long as eight committees had to be informed. This issue of the *Bulletin* boasts that it has identified 40 U.S. officials in American embassies as CIA officers serving under diplomatic cover, including 13 chiefs of station and eight deputy chiefs.

The *Bulletin* not only names these vulnerable individuals in 30 foreign countries but goes into such excruciating detail concerning their past careers as to lend a high degree of credibility to the allegations. As one of the editors of the *Bulletin*, William Schaap, explained to this reporter, the magazine's purpose is to destroy the effectiveness of

the CIA abroad by exposing those identified as irreparable.

Schaap admits that the Russian KGB may be engaged in espionage but claims that "As Americans, we are concerned with reforming our own country. That's why we concentrate on Americans."

On the *Bulletin's* board of advisers, the first name listed is that of Philip Agee, the ex-CIA officer who has made a career and a small fortune out of the business of exposing former colleagues in his books and articles. He was expelled from England for maintaining "regular contacts harmful to the security of the United Kingdom with foreign intelligence officers" as the British government charged.

Whether it is motivated by an appalling naivete on the part of the *Bulletin's* editors or is masterminded by the KGB through the use of Agee, this ongoing exposure of CIA officials involves a massive hemorrhage that is far more damaging than the potential leakage of operational details from an excessive number of congressional committees. The

assassination of the CIA station chief in Greece, Richard Welch, in 1975 shows how tragic can be the consequences of the finger-pointing of CIA officials abroad by Agee and his friends.

But even if more assassinations do not result from the continuing exposures made in subsequent issues, that the *Bulletin* plans to make in the damage done to the careers and usefulness of

For their own protection, they can no longer serve in many corners of the world where terrorists flourish, and many governments will no longer accept them as members of American diplomatic missions once they have been so openly identified.

The real loser is the American public whose security will steadily be eroded by the loss of so much carefully trained talent from the front lines of the long struggle with the KGB and its allies.

No other democratic country attempts to conduct intelligence abroad with so little protection for its career officers. Yet when Sen. John Chafee, R-R.I., moved in the Senate Intelligence Committee to add an amendment to the oversight bill that would have made it a crime punishable by fine and imprisonment for present or former government officials to disclose identities of intelligence officers undercover, he was compelled to withdraw his proposal by a byzantine alliance of opposing forces.

Senator Chafee was persuaded by the Senate leadership that if he pressed his amendment both liberal and conservative factions would move to add so many other amendments that the bill would have no chance of passage and the little progress made would be lost. He reluctantly withdrew his proposal on condition that the committee members would stand solidly against any other

changes, including Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan's proposal to bar any intelligence use of clerics, academics or journalists.

This senatorial horse-trading behind the scenes would be understandable except for the fact that as time passes the lives and careers of an increasing number of U.S. intelligence officers overseas are being seriously endangered.

An attempt to extend criminal penalties for unauthorized disclosures beyond current and former government officials so that they apply to the press would stir up a hornet's nest of First Amendment issues and is probably not feasible. But at least potential future Agees would be effectively discouraged by clear penalties.

Meanwhile, Rep. Edward Derwinski, R-Ill., is locked in a battle with the State Department to strengthen the diplomatic cover of CIA personnel. As things now stand, the State Department refuses to allow intelligence officers to serve abroad as regular foreign service officers with the result that they have to use other forms of specialized diplomatic cover that makes them easily identifiable for what they are. Reform on this front is long overdue, and President Carter's intervention on Derwinski's side would be decisive.

Let us hope that we don't have to wait for a replay of the Welch assassination to shock the Congress and the administration into making the legal and procedural reforms that seem so obviously necessary.